

Lake County News Sun, August 8, 2007

WAUKEGAN -- The City Council has authorized dredging and struck a deal with the federal government to remove hazardous industrial waste from Waukegan's inner harbor.

The council's action Monday night has started the clock ticking toward the eventual elimination of industry on the lakefront. The City Council is adamant in its position to exclusively allow only recreational and residential uses in future lakefront redevelopment.

If the federal government supports the current council's efforts to decertify Waukegan as a federal harbor, National Gypsum and other lakefront plants won't have a future in the city.

The city has put itself at the head of the line to receive more than \$24 million in project funding from the Great Lake Legacy Act, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, told Mayor Richard Hyde and aldermen, whom he called "good partners" in the initiative to obtain 80 percent funding from the federal government.

There are nine other U.S. communities vying for the funding across the Great Lakes region, but Waukegan will be the first one to get a grant for removing 300,000 cubic meters of PCBs from the city's inner harbor, which has been designated a Superfund site. The pollution was caused by industrial companies that have left Waukegan. The few remaining industrial companies were not responsible for the contamination.

"We're getting ahead of the line," Kirk told the council. He congratulated the entire Waukegan City Council who "stood together as Waukegan citizens to clean up the harbor," even after taking a position to seek federal decertification of the harbor to remove all industrial use of the harbor in favor of recreational uses and residential development. This step opens the door for future redevelopment and economic revitalization of the lakefront, Kirk said.

"You've made some tough decisions as a council, and I'm going to back you,"

Kirk said the current redevelopment plan envisioned by the City Council will generate more revenue for Waukegan schools.

Kirk said his amendment to the Great Lakes Legacy Act will add \$5 million in federal funding to Waukegan's cleanup project, which is estimated to cost \$32 million. The legislation was enacted in 2001, and Congress started funding it in 2003, Kirk said.

Dredging on the outer harbor will begin next summer. That project will determine the depth of the inlet to the harbor. If the harbor is decertified, the draft will be too shallow to allow large ships access.